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**Political Militancy and Generation Conflict
in West Germany During the “Red Decade”**

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Over a number of weeks during the winter and early spring of 2001, the pages of German newspapers were filled with a debate about the militant past of current German vice-chancellor and foreign secretary Joschka Fischer. The discussion started when both *Spiegel* and *Stern* magazines published extensive interviews with Fischer and stories about his involvement with the radical left-wing political scene in Frankfurt am Main during the early 1970s. *Stern* magazine headlined the Fischer interview “Yes, I was a militant” (4 January 2001) while *Der Spiegel* entitled its own lead-story “Joschka’s wild year” (8 January 2001). Both publications made ample use of allegedly newly discovered photographs showing a motorcycle-helmet-wearing Fischer beating a policeman during the “Kettenhof riots” against housing speculators in Frankfurt’s Westend in April 1973.¹

The immediate cause for the German media’s intensified interest in Fischer’s past was the trial of Hans-Joachim Klein, one of his acquaintances from the Frankfurt days, for his involvement in the December 1975 attack on the Vienna OPEC headquarters. Having turned his back on terrorism as early as 1976, Klein had lived inconspicuously in France under a false identity to be arrested only in 1998. In October 1999, almost a quarter-century after the OPEC raid, he was put on trial and eventually given the lenient sentence of nine years in prison for his part in the kidnapping and the murder of the three people who had died during the attack.

On 16 January 2001 Fischer appeared as a character witness for Klein in the trial. While he was unable to shed any further light on Klein’s participation in the OPEC raid, as he had lost sight of him significantly earlier than that, Fischer gave a vivid description of the political sub-culture of Frankfurt and the role he had played in it. He eloquently described how, by illegally occupying large unused flats in Frankfurt’s Westend and living collectively, the young members of the local unorganized Left attempted to create a counter-milieu to the prevailing bourgeois consensus in the city. (Mis-)Quoting one of Adorno’s aphorisms, Fischer pointed out that rather than

¹ While the identification of Fischer on the images of photographer Lutz Kleinhans was new, the pictures themselves had been published as early as 1973 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Although not owning the copyright, Bettina Röhl, Ulrike Meinhof’s daughter, had sold them for an undisclosed figure to the press and posted them on her website (www.bettinaroehl.de), until a court-injunction forced her to withdraw them from public view.

waiting for the revolution to occur at some distant point in the future, he and his friends wanted “to lead the right life in the wrong society (*das richtige Leben im falschen führen*)”. As far as his own use of violent direct action against the forces of security during evictions and demonstrations was concerned, Fischer was largely unapologetic. He argued that on those rare occasions he acted in self-defence. At the same time, he pointed out that he never condoned the gratuitous violence that the “armed struggle” against the political system as a whole involved.²

In the newspaper debate surrounding Fischer’s court appearance two camps emerged. The minority position, whose representatives not surprisingly also included members of the CDU/CSU opposition in the Bundestag, argued that although he had apologized to the policeman, he had not distanced himself sufficiently from his past militancy and thus was unfit to serve in government. The majority however claimed that Fischer’s conversion from street-fighting man to vice-chancellor gave evidence for the unifying strength and integrationist force of the (West) German state.

While the discussion was of little consequence and ended as quickly as it began, behind it lurk larger issues. The urgency with which questions concerning the foreign secretary’s – by no means secret – past were asked points to something else. The “Fischer debate” betrays a fundamental insecurity about how the metamorphosis of a significant part of a political generation from militancy to acceptance of the political status quo came about. The discussion about the foreign secretary’s militant youth, a seemingly never-ending flow of terrorist memoirs, as well as international “Prada Meinhof chic”, that is, a superficial fascination with 1970s left-wing militancy in contemporary pop culture and fashion,³ are symptomatic of a lack of knowledge and understanding about the significance of “1968” and the “red decade” (from 1967 to 1977) in relation to recent German history. Marathon runner Fischer might have explained his transformation from young militant to member of the political establishment in his fittingly entitled autobiography *My Long Run to Myself*.⁴

² Josef Hrycyk, *Im Wortlaut: Joschka Fischer im Opec-Prozeß*
www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,117823,00.html (15.1.2002), pp. 4 and 12-14.

³ Cp. Matt Worley, “Come the revolution, we’ll all be in combats.” *The Guardian*, 19.11.1999.

⁴ Cp. Joschka Fischer, *Mein langer Lauf zu mir selbst* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2000).

However, the socio-cultural transformation that the Federal Republic underwent in the 1960s and 1970s and the part that the protest movements and their terrorist offspring played in it are still far from clear.

Gerd Koenen has pointed to two contradictions that need to be addressed by historical research on West Germany from the late 1960s to the 1970s:⁵ firstly, the paradox that the conflict between the militant Left and the state played itself out during the years when SPD-led governments embarked on a long-overdue reform of society. As a result West Germany in many respects became indeed a more liberal and modern society. Yet the same governments stifled the reform spirit with the anti-liberal measures of their “policy of inner security” (*Politik der inneren Sicherheit*). Secondly, the paradox that the liberalisation and modernisation of the Federal Republic supposedly owed much to the input of Fischer’s generation, the “1968ers”, whose outlook was anti-liberal, anti-parliamentary and anti-western and – quite importantly – whose relationship to the use of violence against the state and the forces of order, as Fischer’s example demonstrates, was ambivalent at best.

While this article will not be able to completely resolve these contradictions, it attempts to both shed further light on them and provide insights on how the events of late 1960s and 1970s might be explained from a perspective that interprets them as symptoms of a conflict between political generations. The discussion of generation conflict will be interwoven with a counter-narrative of intergenerational understanding, which proves rather untypical of these conflict-ridden years. The history of the personal relationship between Gaby Tiedemann and Heinrich Albertz. will demonstrate that if a politician was willing to assume the role of a surrogate father and, in so doing, relinquish his responsibilities towards the political system to the benefit of what Max Weber called “absolute ethics” (*Gesinnungsethik*), was there an alternative to the escalation of violence, which was characteristic for the stand-off between West Germany’s militant left-wing youth and the **élites** of its state and society.

Comment [KS1]: Fehler: elites

⁵ Cp. Gerd Koenen, “Die Putztruppe – Ein ABC der Gewalt.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13.1.2001 and Matthias Arning, “Lücken im Familienroman. Gerd Koenen über ‘das rote Jahrzehnt’ 1967-1977.” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 27.1.2001.

The Lorenz kidnapping

On 3 March 1975 Gaby Tiedemann was released from prison in Essen. She was freed in exchange for Peter Lorenz, the chairman and mayoral candidate of the West Berlin Christian Democrats for the Senate elections of 2 March 1975, who had been abducted by the left-wing terrorist group MOVEMENT 2ND OF JUNE (*Bewegung 2. Juni*) five days earlier. After her release Tiedemann and four other freed militants, Verena Becker, Rolf Heißler, Rolf Pohle and Ingrid Siepmann, met with Heinrich Albertz, formerly the SPD mayor of Berlin and now the protestant pastor of one of the city's parishes, on a runway of Frankfurt airport. The Lorenz kidnappers had expressed their demands in a letter to the West German press agency (*Deutsche Presseagentur*, dpa) that was to be published in the major newspapers. Most importantly, they wanted six of their jailed "comrades" to be released from various prisons in West Germany and West Berlin. These included the then left-wing lawyer Horst Mahler, who was serving a fourteen-year sentence in Berlin-Tegel for formation of a terrorist organisation, attempted murder and his part in the liberation of Andreas Baader in May 1970. Mahler however quickly declined to be released.⁶ The remaining five had to be flown to an Arab country of their choice and receive a ransom of DM 20,000 each. On their journey they were "to be accompanied to their destination by a figure in public life". The letter specified that "this person [was] to be the parson and retired mayor Heinrich Albertz".⁷

After the five had reached their destination safely, Albertz was supposed to return home in possession of a codeword, which, once made public over German state television, would lead to the immediate release of Lorenz. When Albertz made himself available, the Social-Liberal coalition government under Helmut Schmidt caved in to the kidnappers' demands. This was not only done in agreement with the inter-party large crisis team (*großer Krisenstab*), which included the leaders of the

⁶ Released from prison in 1978, Mahler has attracted public attention again as intellectual figurehead for the German far right and legal representative of the NPD in its **since March 2003 ultimately successful** battle against the current government's attempt to have it banned by the German constitutional court.

⁷ *Die Entführung von Peter Lorenz. Eine Dokumentation der Berliner Morgenpost über die Zeit vom 27. Februar bis 5. März 1975* (Berlin: Springer, 1975), p. 23.

opposition Helmut Kohl and Franz-Josef Strauß, but also with the overwhelming support of the press and the majority of the population. In a poll on West Berlin election weekend by the Allensbach Institut, 56 percent of those asked were in favour of a deal with the kidnappers, 36 percent against.⁸ In what became the first successful abduction of a public figure in West Germany and remained the only incident in which the West German state allowed itself to be blackmailed by the militant Left, Peter Lorenz, shaken but unharmed, was released soon after.

That Heinrich Albertz should accompany the freed terrorists was fraught with political symbolism. Albertz was mayor of West Berlin on the day in 1967 that gave the MOVEMENT 2ND OF JUNE its name. On the evening of 2 June 1967, Benno Ohnesorg, a twenty-six-year-old university student, was shot dead by a West Berlin police officer during a demonstration against the Shah of Persia's visit to Germany. Experienced and perceived by Ohnesorg's age cohort as a particularly powerful political event, his death was crucial for the formation of the "generation of 1968" as a "political generation". Furthermore, this first of three "critical events" for the "1968ers" over the following year also marked the beginning of the end of the non-violent phase in the confrontation between the New Left protest movements and the then governing Grand Coalition between the SPD and CDU/CSU.⁹ That was primarily because the police behaviour raised the question whether the use of counter-violence was legitimate. Most of the protesters saw the exaggerated security measures during the Shah's visit as proof for their suspicion that behind the democratic façade of the Federal Republic a proto-fascist state not unlike Persia itself was lurking.

The second critical event came ten months later, again in Berlin. On 11 April 1968 Rudi Dutschke, leading theoretician of the Socialist German Student League (*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, SDS) and figurehead of the anti-authoritarian student movement, was shot on the Kurfürstendamm and seriously injured by a neo-Nazi youth. Rather than blaming the assassination attempt on the

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 59.

⁹ On the term "critical event" and for a summary of New Left thought see Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "May 1968 in France: The Rise and Fall of a Social Movement." In Carol Fink/Philipp Gassert/Detlef Junker eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 253-76, 257 and 260-2.

gunman alone, the protest movement laid the main responsibility for it at the doorsteps of the conservative newspaper tycoon Axel Springer. For them *Bild*, the populist flagship of Springer's press empire, which had portrayed Dutschke as "the incarnation of disorderliness and revolutionary evil", had inspired Josef Bachmann, a drifter and petty criminal, in his attempt on Dutschke's life.¹⁰ Although Dutschke survived on the occasion, in 1979 he died prematurely at age thirty-nine from the long-term effects of the injuries inflicted upon him.

Over the following Easter days of 1968, demonstrations and blockades of Springer printing houses and distribution centres all over West Germany mobilized more than 50,000 protesters as well as 21,000 policemen. In what over five days and nights became the worst episodes of civil unrest in West Germany since the early 1930s, more than 1,000 protesters were arrested, 400 people were injured, quite a few of them seriously.¹¹ In Munich there were two deaths during the Easter riots. During the night 11 to 12 April an Associated Press photographer and a student at the city's Technical University lost their lives following injuries sustained during demonstrations.

The third critical event, which, however, already heralded the end of the protest movements, occurred against the background of the events in France in May 1968. In early summer of that year, the Bundestag was in the process of passing the Emergency Laws. These were a series of constitutional amendments intended to grant the government sufficient executive powers in cases of national emergencies, including severe internal unrest.¹² As this legislation was reminiscent of Article 48 of the Weimar constitution, it met with opposition from much of the left of the political spectrum, including the left wing of the SPD, the metal and chemical workers unions, and, last but not least, the student movement, which switched its attention from the

¹⁰ Rob Burns/Wilfried van der Will, *Protest and Democracy in West Germany. Extra-Parliamentary Opposition and the Democratic Agenda* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 109-11.

¹¹ Figures according to Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung. Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail 1946-1995*, vol. I *Chronik* (Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard, 1998), pp. 304-5.

¹² Andrei S. Markovits/Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 54.

protest against the Vietnam War to this issue. On 11 May, the Extra-parliamentary opposition (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition*, APO) succeeded in mobilising around 60,000 demonstrators who converged on Bonn in a march from all over West Germany.¹³ Although the ability to get tens of thousands of students and workers onto the streets on this occasion was a significant success, the alignment of West German New Left and Old Left, which seemed to fulfil long-harboured hopes of a lasting alliance capable of achieving the New Left's ultimate aim of a wholesale revolution, proved even more short-lived than its French equivalent.¹⁴ While increasing numbers of students became sensitive "to the fact that democracy could never be taken for granted and that a politically alert electorate was required to make its voice felt"¹⁵, if necessary with unconventional means, in the aftermath the organized working class returned to conventional politics. Thus it became clear that the transition from protest to complete overthrow of the political order proved to be far beyond the capacity of the protest movements.

This insight then marked the beginning of the "long march through the institutions", a much slower and more laborious process on the road to revolution.¹⁶ However, while both APO and SDS dissolved in 1969-70, the idealistic impetus of their members was by no means spent by then. The majority of leftist university graduates joined the SPD eager to make sure that after the 1969 changeover of government the Social-Liberal coalition under chancellor Willy Brandt would hold true its promises to accelerate the overdue reforms of state and society, which had slowly begun under the Grand Coalition. Others, like Fischer, turned to grassroots political activity in one of the K-groups (*K-Gruppen*), a myriad of Leninist or Maoist avant-garde workers' parties, founded in universities, schools, enterprises or parts of towns and cities in West

¹³ Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. I *Chronik*, pp. 320-1.

¹⁴ Markovits/Gorski, p. 57.

¹⁵ Burns/van der Will, p. 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 115. Cp. Dutschke's statements in this respect in the famous December 1967 television interview with Günter Gaus. In Günter Gaus, *Was bleibt, sind Fragen. Die klassischen Interviews*, ed. Hans-Dieter Schütt (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2000), pp. 432-51.

Germany, in order to prepare the “proletariat” for the overthrow of capitalism.¹⁷ Others yet again responded with a retreat from politics. They “dropped out” (*aussteigen*) from society in order to construct an “alternative” life. As Fischer’s attempts to “lead the right life in the wrong society” demonstrate, the boundaries between these groups were permeable. This was also true in relation to the small contingent, which joined the RED CELLS (*Rote Zellen*), 2ND OF JUNE and the RED ARMY FACTION (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, RAF). However, while for the majority of the post-APO Left state-power needed to be confronted with passive resistance by employing non-violent direct action techniques like demonstrations, peaceful blockades and occupations of buildings with physical damage to property as the limit of their militancy, this minority eventually went a step further. Those who founded or chose the latter groups set out on a path where causing personal injury and even murder seemed to be ultimately legitimate in the “armed struggle against the system”.¹⁸

Frankfurt – Aden

On 3 March 1975, the five released prisoners, Albertz and two flight crews of four spent altogether ten hours aboard of a Lufthansa Boeing. After making the German authorities believe that the destination of the flight from Frankfurt was Tripoli or Addis Ababa, the plane was eventually redirected towards Aden in the People’s Republic of Yemen. Following protracted negotiations between Albertz and the Yemeni authorities, it was allowed to land and its passengers were issued visitors’ permits.

Despite the unusual circumstances, the atmosphere on board was friendly. This was certainly mainly due to a mutual understanding that the parties depended upon one another – Becker, Heißler, Pohle, Siepmann and Tiedemann in order to regain their personal freedom for good, Albertz to have Lorenz released and keep himself and the flight crews out of harm’s way. While, as the pastor put it in retrospect, he was not afraid of being taken hostage himself – after all the flight had not been hijacked – he

¹⁷ Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt. Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967-1977* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001), pp. 325-33.

¹⁸ Markovits/Gorski, pp. 57-8.

worried about being able to physically cope with this difficult situation. The group however treated him courteously, even with “moving signs of care” when they reminded Albertz, who was suffering from poor circulation, to take his medication on time. He in turn reciprocated the friendliness by giving one of his shirts to Pohle, who, wearing a woollen sweater, was suffering from the heat in the Middle East. Although, as Albertz remembered with dark humour, neither he nor the terrorists experienced “a first class feeling”, he succeeded in breaking down tensions and gaining the group’s trust.¹⁹

More than with any other member of the group Albertz established a special rapport with Gaby Tiedemann. Like Horst Mahler, Tiedemann, a former university student of sociology and politics, initially declined to be released from prison. However, eventually she changed her mind. At the time, she was serving an eight-year jail sentence on two charges of attempted murder after a shoot-out with police in 1973. She had been caught in the act of stealing car registration plates needed for the bank robberies, which terrorist groups carried out in order to finance life in the underground and to contribute in “the expropriation of wealth and the means of production that belong to the government, the monopoly capitalists, the land owners and the imperialists”.²⁰ Through his friendly and relaxed attitude and his ability to listen, Albertz gained Tiedemann’s confidence.²¹

As mayor of West Berlin, Albertz was politically responsible for the events of 2 June 1967. While initially he defended the extremely comprehensive security measures during the Shah’s visit as necessary and excused the harsh police behaviour, including the shot that killed Ohnesorg, he soon changed his mind and came over to the side of the protesters. Although Albertz used a pretext for his resignation in September 1967, in reality he left office because that day represented a personal Damascus for him.²² In

¹⁹ Heinrich Albertz, “‘Kein First-Class-Gefühl’. Heinrich Albertz über den Geisel-Flug nach Aden.” *Der Spiegel*, 10 March 1975 and *idem*, *Wir dürfen nicht schweigen. Ein politisches Gespräch mit Wolfgang Herles* (Munich: Kindler, 1993), pp. 80-2.

²⁰ Quoted in Markovits/Gorski, p. 67.

²¹ Jacques Schuster, *Heinrich Albertz – der Mann, der mehrere Leben lebte. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Alexander Fest Verlag, 1997), pp. 295-6.

²² Heinrich Albertz, “Erinnerungen an den 2. Juni.” In Eckhard Siepmann ed., *Heiß und Kalt. Die Jahre 1945-69. Das BilderLeseBuch* (Berlin: Espresso Verlag, 1986), pp. 570-2.

his farewell speech as a parliamentarian of Berlin's *Abgeordnetenhaus* three years later, he pointed out: "I was weakest when I was hardest, that is during that night of 2 June, because I did objectively the wrong thing." Asked where he had failed on the occasion in a 1992 newspaper interview, Albertz had the following to say:

I mean the harsh reaction in general. Not so much the police, that's hard to control anyway, so one has to be careful in passing judgement. Much more that one believed – and that was the mistake – that one could in any way stop or even destroy this movement [...] by repression or by confrontation.²³

From his resignation as mayor until his death Albertz would use his position as protestant churchman and prominent author and publicist to become a "mediator between politics and counter-culture" (*Der Spiegel*, 31 August 1981). Even before the Easter riots of 1968, he called for an end of confrontation and a "new beginning" in the relationship between state and protest movements. This did not make him too many friends among professional politicians and West German society. Thus when, in an interview after his return from Aden, Albertz reminded the German public "that all [of the five terrorists] could be [their] sons and daughters", this was met with little or no understanding from most quarters.²⁴

It will not come as a surprise, then, that in the next decades Albertz continued to support minority positions and unpopular causes, often against the official line of the SPD. In the late 1970s, he joined the peace movement, speaking out against the NATO decision to deploy new nuclear weapons on West German soil and even participating in the peaceful blockade of a US atomic depot in September 1983. He also belonged to the staunchest critics of the way German reunification was achieved, for him "a brutal invasion of the West Germans". And he rejected the "asylum compromise" of 1992 in which the Kohl government restricted the flow of refugees into Germany by changing one of the basic rights of the constitution with the support of the SPD opposition.²⁵

²³ Willi Lindemann, "Repression – ein falscher Weg. Heinrich Albertz erinnert sich an den 2. Juni 1967." *Berliner Zeitung*, 30.5.1992.

²⁴ "Verlorene Söhne und Töchter. Claus Christian Malzahn im Gespräch mit Pfarrer Heinrich Albertz, dem Grandseigneur des Dialogs." *Die Tageszeitung*, 22.5.1992.

²⁵ Cp. "Heinrich Albertz." In *Munzinger Archiv. Internationales Biographisches Archiv* 32/93.

From the late 1980s onwards, Albrecht also became one of the most vocal supporters of an official pardon for terrorists who had already served long sentences and distanced themselves from their militant past. In this context Albrecht and Tiedemann would get in contact with each other again more than a decade after their first encounter.

Generation conflict

In March 1978, the sociologist Norbert Elias reflected in an essay on the “German autumn” of the previous year from the distance of Amsterdam.²⁶ His hypothesis was that the tensions that characterized public life in the Federal Republic from 1967 onwards were the expression of a crisis of the German “social habitus” – Elias’ preferred term for what is commonly called national identity – which manifested itself in a “conflict between [political] generations”.²⁷ In drawing a direct comparison with the crisis of national identity that Germany had experienced after the First World War because of the failure of its élites to acknowledge total defeat, Elias argued that the clash between political generations had its main root in missed opportunities after 1945. To quote Elias directly:

The far-reaching disorientation, the growing helplessness about the direction, worth and meaning of the Federal Republic which can be observed are a consequence of the attempt to hush up the fact that the disaster of National Socialism and the destruction of German unity which it brought about have created a new situation.²⁸

Thus for Elias, what was happening in West Germany in the preceding decade was inevitable after both the breakdown of civilisation from 1933 to 1945 and the “communicative silence” (Hermann Lübbe), respectively the “selective accounts” (Robert G. Moeller), about it in the post-war era. The escalation of tensions to the point of an “enormous bitterness and enmity” between militant Left, state and society was primarily due to the unwillingness of West Germany’s leading strata to begin a

Comment [KS2]: Besser: discreet

²⁶ Norbert Elias, “Gedanken über die Bundesrepublik.” *Merkur. Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* 39 (1985), pp. 735-55.

²⁷ Elias, *The Germans. Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996; original German version Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 19, 408 and 413. Cp. also Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell’s preface, *ibid.* p. ix.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 418.

dialogue about the country's past. Instead of beginning a public discussion about the Nazi period, the pre-war generation of Albertz (born 1915), Willy Brandt (1913) and Schmidt (1918), as well as the "1945ers", that is, the "sceptical generation" (Helmut Schelsky) of Flakhelfers and young front-soldiers, largely chose to remain silent. Pragmatism ruled their attitude to the functional élites of Nazism, which were almost completely reinstalled under Adenauer's chancellorship.²⁹ If because of the power-relations not much could be done in terms of correcting stalled de-nazification efforts, one had to wait for a "natural solution" and meanwhile concentrate on rebuilding the country and hope for the future.

Despite significant changes in the "politics concerning the past" (*Vergangenheitspolitik*), which occurred since the end of the 1950s, and not, as is often claimed, as a result of "1968", the damage was already done. Now the country had to pay a high price. Furthermore, in Elias' opinion, after the war West Germany's élites had displayed a general lack of "patience, moderation, tolerance and conscious caring about the chances for fulfilment of those who are growing up", while in the present they resorted to "excessive media campaigns, oppressive laws and above all use of the law as a means of party-political power".³⁰

All of this allowed West Germany's war and post-war children to cloak themselves in the various guises of Marxist theory as a kind of camouflage for the 1960s and 1970s. The real story behind the ideological façade of New Left versions of Marxism-Leninism, Maoism etc. read like this for Elias: "We have taken on the guilt of our parents and grandparents that they did not want to or could not face because it was unbearable. We derive our pride from the knowledge of being the better Germans because we are ashamed of being German."³¹

At the same time, New Left theory served the younger generations as a means of orientation in their search for meaning during the prosperity that the "economic

²⁹ Cp. e.g. Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past. The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002; original German version Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996). See also Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

³⁰ Elias, *The Germans*, pp. 412-3.

³¹ Cp. *ibid.* p. 406.

miracle” of the 1950s and 1960s had brought. While anti-colonialist theoreticians like Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon and Carlos Marighella legitimized the use of counter-violence against the state, they also provided an ideological basis for a new “humanistic ethos” which – for Elias, “one of the most moving experiences of [these] times” – allowed these young Germans to identify themselves with “the struggle against injustice, oppression, exploitation of people throughout the world”.³²

That Elias took a generation perspective in his analysis of the events of the German autumn is not surprising. Firstly, his essay is the logical extension of his posthumous last book, *The Germans*, in which he applied his socio-genetic and psycho-genetic theory of the civilising process to the development of national identity in nineteenth and twentieth-century Germany. Secondly, in focusing on power struggles between political generations, Elias followed in the footsteps of Karl Mannheim whose assistant he had been before being deprived of an academic career in Germany in 1933. In the 1920s, Mannheim himself had developed the first elaborate historical theory of generations, when, since the turn of the twentieth century, organized youth emerged as an important factor in German politics and society.³³ Last but not least, German history offers itself quite naturally to interpretations of this sort, since, as Mark Roseman put it, there is a “striking persistence of youthful rebellion in Germany”. The most obvious rationale for the frequent outbreak of open hostilities between political generations of Germans from the young writers of the *Sturm und Drang* of the 1780s to the terrorists of the 1970s is that “few other nations have experienced such a succession of dramatic breaks in their historical narrative”.³⁴ These ruptures in turn guaranteed a high degree of social mobility between generations.

³² *Ibid.* p. 417.

³³ Cp. Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations.” In Kurt H. Wolf ed., *From Karl Mannheim* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993), pp. 351-98; originally published as “Das Problem der Generationen.” *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie* 7 (1928), pp. 157-80 and 309-50.

³⁴ Mark Roseman, “Introduction: generation conflict and German history 1770-1968.” In *idem* ed., *Generations in Conflict. Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-24, here pp. 1-2.

For historians of modern Germany, it must arguably follow that in terms of analysis “generation” is of similar relevance as “class” or “status”. The importance of “generation” as an analytical category has been widely recognized by historical scholarship on “1968” both as an international and a German phenomenon. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, stresses the generational aspect of the youth revolt and credits it with achieving a “cultural revolution”, which necessarily followed from the social revolution, which the “golden age” of economic development had brought about.³⁵ Along similar lines, Geoff Eley recently claimed that the rebelliousness of radical youth in Germany and elsewhere “had antipatriarchal qualities – against the power of fathers in families but also against long-established political authority, embodied in the governing gerontocracy”.³⁶ And, while also emphasising intergenerational conflict, Heinz Bude has focused on six German life histories in order to elucidate the different ways in which those born between 1938 and 1948 **in** tried to extricate themselves from what they saw as the conservative restoration of the 1950s.³⁷

Comment [KS3]: Fehler:
delete

Unanswered questions

When reading recent surveys of the history of the Federal Republic by German historians, one recognizes that “1968” is “particularly prone to being overloaded with meaning, if not myth-making”.³⁸ Most authors follow the verdicts of Jürgen Habermas and Richard von Weizsäcker, both of whom assigned the breakthrough of a democratic society and the liberalisation of West Germany’s political culture to the impact of the youth revolt.³⁹ Manfred Görtemaker, for example, speaks of a “re-foundation” (*Umgründung*) of the republic as a result of “1968”, while for Heinrich

³⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), pp. 320-43.

³⁶ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 354.

³⁷ Cp. Heinz Bude, *Das Altern einer Generation. Die Jahrgänge 1938-1948* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1995).

³⁸ Hanna Schissler, “Rebels in Search of a Cause.” In *idem* ed., *The Miracle Years. A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 459-67, here p. 460.

³⁹ Cp. *ibid.* and Jürgen Habermas, “Der Marsch durch die Institutionen hat auch die CDU erreicht.” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11.3.1988.

August Winkler the events of the late 1960s aided in Germany's "long path to the West".⁴⁰ Thus, according to what has become mainstream opinion among historians of twentieth-century Germany, without "1968", the present-day Federal Republic would not be able to call itself a liberal democracy and pride itself to have a modern civil society.

However, quite interestingly, the already-mentioned paradoxes, which were characteristic for the clash between political generations in "1968" and particularly in what followed during the "red decade" until 1977 are barely touched upon. Reference is scarcely made to the contradiction that the conflict between the militant Left and the state played itself out during the years when two SPD chancellors embarked on a long-overdue reform of the West German state and society. And – to repeat the second exemplary contradiction – that the liberalisation and modernisation of the country was supposedly largely due to a protest generation whose own outlook was anti-liberal, anti-parliamentary and anti-western.

In order to shed further light on these paradoxes from the perspective of generation conflict, one can look at a set of questions. Why was it that violence reigned during the "German autumn" of 1977? Why was it that the occasional bombings, kidnappings and murders of – to borrow the phrase from the novelist Heinrich Böll – six provoked such a hysterical reaction by the sixty million? Why was it that when Hanns-Martin Schleyer, president of the German Employers Federation (*Bund Deutscher Arbeitgeber*, BDA) and head of the board of directors of Daimler Benz, was abducted by the RAF in order to free its leadership, at least half of all West Germans – and that must have included large sections of the electorate of the Social Democrats – were in favour of reintroducing the death penalty?⁴¹ While the often voiced suggestion that, as a reprisal measure, the government should make short work

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⁴⁰ Manfred Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999) and Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, vol. ii, *Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000). Cp. also Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000), p. 46. Kraushaar refers to the years from 1967 to 1969 as the key-period for the Federal Republic's "belated socio-cultural foundation" (*Nachgründung*).

⁴¹ Richard Evans, *Rituals of Retribution. Capital Punishment in Germany, 1600-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), statistical appendix, tables 14 and 15.

of the RAF inmates in the high-security prison in Stuttgart-Stammheim easily found its way into the mass media of the time, information on Schleyer's career as a member of the SS and a staff officer in Reinhard Heydrich's economic administration of occupied Czechoslovakia was conspicuously absent.⁴²

Why did the Schmidt government abandon Brandt's optimistic 1969 promise to the protest movements to "dare more democracy" and react so heavy-handedly to the threat posed by a minority at the margins of political life? This was a government that presumably had accepted the main criticisms of "1968" and aimed at modernising German society after decades of conservative rule. And it did so quite successfully. If we look at the reform legislation concerning social security and pensions (1970, 1972), co-determination in enterprises (1976), abortion law (reform of section 218 of the German penal code in 1976), marriage and family law (1976) and education, including higher education, West Germany indeed became a more liberal and modern society.

At the same time, by evoking the memory of the self-induced collapse of the Weimar Republic, the SPD-led government reacted to RAF, 2ND OF JUNE and other militant groups with the concept of "belligerent democracy" (*wehrhafte Demokratie*). It introduced authoritarian legislation ranging from the Decree on Radicals (*Radikalenerlaß*) – the "Ban on Careers" in the parlance of the extra-parliamentary Left – which excluded communists from civil service jobs since 1972, to the infamous 1977 Lex Baader-Meinhof (*Kontaktsperregesetz*). The latter, rushed through the Bundestag in a matter of days, among other measures limited the access of lawyers to their defendants during the Schleyer abduction and at the time led Otto Schily, the current German home secretary, to resign his brief in protest.

Taken as a whole, the measures of the policy of inner security of the 1970s raised the spectre of West Germany becoming a surveillance state where police and the internal secret service were allowed to inspect and supervise nearly every aspect of its citizens' private and public lives. The internal secret service alone gathered some two

⁴² *Ein deutscher Herbst. Zustände 1977* (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1997), p. 134 and Elias, *The Germans*, p. 430.

million files on suspected inner enemies.⁴³ In Horst Herold “a modernizer and security intellectual” was appointed head of a greatly strengthened and expanded Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (*Bundeskriminalamt*, BKA).⁴⁴ His ambition went “far beyond mere oppression [of crime] and extended to the preventative planning of a cybernetically steered society”.⁴⁵ Accordingly, BKA officials secretly tapped telephone lines and checked up on vast numbers of unsuspecting citizens.

Of course, one can explain much of what guided the “policy of inner security” by pointing to the experience of Weimar and the fact that the West German state was by no means a monolithic block in the 1970s. While the Social-Liberal coalition in Bonn initially wanted to avoid further confrontation and reintegrate the “1968ers” by, for instance, granting a comprehensive amnesty for violations of the demonstration laws in 1970, the SPD in particular was concerned about how its own youth wing, the Young Socialists (*Jungsozialisten*, Jusos), attempted to re-ideologize the party in their own version of the long march through the institutions.⁴⁶ At the same time, the CDU/CSU opposition, which for much of that decade could delay legislation in the Federal Council, was keen on discrediting *Ostpolitik*, détente and reconciliation with eastern Europe, by claiming that the government was “soft on communism abroad and ‘extremists’ at home”.⁴⁷ The SPD in government felt certainly vulnerable on this front, since despite the party’s firm integration into the social and political system of the Federal Republic after *Godesberg*, it had only in 1969 become the largest party in the Bundestag and still felt the need to prove its reliability. Add to this the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972, for which the authorities had been completely unprepared, the murder of a federal judge by the RAF in 1974 and the successful Lorenz kidnapping – to name just the most prominent incidents of terrorism during

⁴³ Gerhard Braunthal, *Political Loyalty and Public Service in West Germany: The 1972 Decree against Radicals and its Consequences* (Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p. 166.

⁴⁴ A. D. Moses, “The State and the Student Movement in West Germany, 1967-77.” In Gerard J. DeGroot ed., *Student Protest. The Sixties and After* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), pp. 139-49, here p. 146.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Burns/van der Will, 62. Cp. also Dorothea Hauser, *Baader und Herold. Beschreibung eines Kampfes* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998), especially pp. 179-86.

⁴⁶ Markovits/Gorski, pp. 94-5.

⁴⁷ Moses, p. 145.

the chancellorship of the former army officer Schmidt – and the turn towards the strong state becomes understandable.

While all these factors played a role in determining the reaction of the West German authorities and of society at large, one is nevertheless struck by the extent of repression and surveillance, which those in power felt was necessary in response to the challenge of the militant Left. As Markovits and Gorski put it: “Above all, the state’s measures seemed inappropriate, due to the fact that any kind of left-wing extremism, let alone of the terrorist sort, enjoyed absolutely no support among the population as a whole.”⁴⁸

Why however – to continue with another question – did so many on the Left, not just the radical and militant Left, adhere to conspiracy theories and believe that the state had secretly murdered the Stammheim inmates of the RAF in their cells? That suspicion was first voiced when Ulrike Meinhof, arrested with the other leaders of the RAF as early as June 1972, could not bear life in prison any longer and hanged herself in May 1976. The discovery of the dead bodies of Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe in their cells a year-and-a-half later on 18 October 1977 seemed to confirm it. To be sure, the leaders of the RAF in all likelihood took their own lives because they saw no other alternative. After the liberation of another Lufthansa Boeing by German special forces in Mogadishu in Somalia the day before – this time hijacked by a PLO commando during the Schleyer abduction to put additional pressure on the state to release its political prisoners – this seemed to be the last possible alternative to serving their life sentences. Moreover, collective suicide guaranteed them the status of martyrs, since many left of the political centre believed that the state had resorted to Gestapo methods in dealing with its political adversaries.⁴⁹

How then was it possible that the conflict between the state and the militant Left had gradually escalated, until all channels of communication had completely broken down

⁴⁸ Markovits/Gorski, p. 77.

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Kraushaar, “Die Schleyer-Entführung: 44 Tage ohne Opposition. Die Linke im Zirkelschluß von RAF und Staat.” In *Ein deutscher Herbst. Zustände 1977* (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1997), pp. 156-69, here p. 169.

and those involved on both sides were either overwhelmed by fear or consumed by violent fantasies of punishment and destruction? Of course, on the surface this was the result of an accelerating spiral of tit for tat, violence and counter-violence. However, on a deeper level, the answer for this question has indeed to be sought in the clash between different political generations and in their respective attitudes towards the Nazi past. Both the West German electorate and the élites of the state, which felt it necessary to resort to exaggerated repressive measures in order to protect the constitution, and those who wanted to bring down liberal democracy were encased in the experience of the Third Reich. For both sides it was a historical memory, which determined their political actions in the present. While many of the exponents of the German political system had made their formative experiences during the 1930s, terrorism itself was the by-product of a self-righteous rebellion against fascism.⁵⁰ In this sense, engaging in political violence against the Federal Republic simply meant carrying the “accusing anger of children against the guilty silence of parents”⁵¹ to its extremes.

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At the apex of this confrontation, there was only fear and violence, violence, which, as Hannah Arendt put it, is incapable of speech. It was this silence, this absence of communication, which Gaby Tiedemann and Heinrich Albertz briefly overcame during their flight from Frankfurt to Aden on 3 March 1975. That they were able to establish a meaningful dialogue, if only for a short time, allowed them to develop their acquaintance into a lasting friendship more than a decade later.

Tiedemann on trial

In April 1987 Albertz got in touch again with Tiedemann by writing to her in prison in Hindelbank near Bern in Switzerland. After a shoot-out with border-guards at the Franco-Swiss border in December 1977, Tiedemann had been arrested and given a further fifteen years for attempted murder by a Swiss court. The occasion for Albertz’ letter was that after having served the obligatory two thirds of her sentence, five years

⁵⁰ Michael Geyer/Miriam Hansen, “German-Jewish Memory and National Consciousness.” In Geoffrey H. Hartman ed., *Holocaust Remembrance. The Shapes of Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 175-90, here p. 176.

⁵¹ Eley, p. 418.

of which she spent in complete isolation, Tiedemann was about to be extradited to sit out the remainder of her previous German conviction. At the beginning of 1988 she was returned to Germany.

In his letter, Albertz pointed out that “during those days [of the Lorenz kidnapping] and particularly because of their encounter he had learned a lot about mankind and how we should treat one another”.⁵² In her reply, Tiedemann wrote that Albertz stood for “something strange and out of place” during those days in 1975. In her interpretation he “quite possibly represented her own inner voice which she had to suppress at the time”.⁵³ From this renewal of their acquaintance ensued a closer contact, through prison visits by Albertz and a regular correspondence between the two.

On the occasions of his visits Tiedemann opened up to Albertz. This was certainly aided by the fact that as a young man Albertz had opposed the Nazi regime. As a member of the Confessing Church, he himself had spent a considerable amount of time in prison after a 1943 sermon in support of Martin Niemöller.⁵⁴ Tiedemann was born to middle-class parents in the GDR in 1951. Both of her parents were schoolteachers. When she was six years old, her father, in her own words, an alcoholic and during the war “a convinced Nazi”, was given a prison sentence for spreading right-wing propaganda under the influence of drink. A few years later he was released and deported to West Germany, to where his family followed him. After her parents’ divorce in 1969, Tiedemann lost all contact to her father. She joined the West Berlin political underground in the summer of 1972.⁵⁵

In her letters to Albertz, Tiedemann reflected both on her past and her current situation. Before his first visit in August 1988, she pointed out that she had turned her back on the “armed struggle” as early as 1980. Nevertheless, the authorities still

⁵² Heinrich Albertz to Gaby Tiedemann, 1 April 1987, Archive Gabriele B.H.F. (Gaby) Tiedemann (1951-1995), 1975-1995, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Box 8, Folder 3.

⁵³ Tiedemann to Albertz, 28 May 1987, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Cp. *Munzinger Archiv* 32/93.

⁵⁵ Kantonspolizei Bern, Protocol of the interrogation of Gaby Tiedemann, 4 January 1978, [Archive Tiedemann, Box 11, Folder 2](#).

treated her as a security risk of the first order. She felt that in view of this, words like re-socialisation and reintegration into society sounded as if they were meant to heap scorn on her. All she could see was “endless revenge and retaliation”.⁵⁶

But worse was to come for her. In November 1989 Tiedemann was again put on trial in Cologne, this time for a double murder. Like Hans-Joachim Klein in 1999, she was accused of having participated in the 1975 raid on the OPEC headquarter in Vienna. During the attack, in which eleven oil ministers of OPEC states were held hostage for twenty hours before being eventually flown to Algeria with the kidnappers, two of the casualties, an Austrian police officer and an Iraqi bodyguard, were supposedly shot execution-style by the only female member of the group, known only by her cover name “Nada”. In the aftermath it was widely assumed that Nada was Gaby Tiedemann.⁵⁷ As opposed to Klein, who, injured by a stray-bullet during the attack, had to be treated in a Viennese hospital and could be positively identified, Tiedemann’s identity could not be proven beyond reasonable doubt even at the time, because the Austrian authorities had bungled their investigation.⁵⁸ Fourteen years later it was even less possible to prove her involvement and that was her salvation. On 22 May 1990 she was acquitted by the Cologne Landgericht.

Comment [KS7]: Change: On 22 May 1990 the Cologne Landgericht acquitted her.

The trial makes for interesting reading, as it took place under circumstances completely different from those of the “red decade”. From the end of 1989 to early summer 1990 German public life was primarily occupied with the collapse of communism and preparations for reunification. Accordingly, the proceedings were conducted in an extraordinarily sober and unspectacular manner and did not attract

⁵⁶ Tiedemann to Albertz, 28 July 1988, Nachlaß Heinrich Albertz, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn, Folder 123.

⁵⁷ Cp. e.g. [Österreichisches] Bundeskanzleramt ed., *Die Vorfälle vom 21. und 22. Dezember 1975 (Überfall auf die Teilnehmer der OPEC-Konferenz). Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Vienna: Bundeskanzleramt, 1976), pp. 51 and 60. According to Klein’s “memoirs” *Rückkehr in die Menschlichkeit* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1986) as well, Gaby Tiedemann was Nada.

⁵⁸ For instance, although the group of five men and one woman did not wear gloves, no fingerprints were ever taken. Moreover, the witness testimonies would not have stood up in court because of the way questioning had been conducted. This has led to speculation about a cover-up by the Austrian authorities for fear of future terrorist reprisals. It is widely believed that Libya, itself an OPEC country, was behind the Vienna events of December 1975.

large crowds.⁵⁹ Testimony to the changed political climate was also that while Tiedemann was put on trial for murder, the prosecution had refrained from accusing her of section 129a of the German penal code, i.e. formation of a terrorist organisation.

At the same time, she herself seemed to be a changed person. Not only had she altered her appearance beyond recognition and gained a vocational degree while in prison, but she was also quick to condemn the murder of Alfred Herrhausen by the RAF on 30 November 1989 in a statement to the court. She called the killing of the head of Deutsche Bank “indicative for the RAF’s complete loss of a sense of reality”.⁶⁰

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Last but not least, Tiedemann had public figures like the Green Party MP Antje Vollmer and Heinrich Albertz as well as parts of the mainstream German press behind her.⁶¹ Having become a surrogate father to her, Albertz supported her materially, by contributing to the cost of her defence, as well as in his writings. In a 1989 diary he wrote the following entry on occasion of the trial:

Whatever she may have done in Vienna, she has been sufficiently punished by fourteen years in prison, [...], for a long time [she has been] distant from the views of terrorist criminals, [she is] a human being who wants to and can start afresh. [...] Fiat iustitia, pereat mundus. No, this is not how the world perishes. But a human being perishes. Another human being in the endless chain of violence and counter-violence.⁶²

In May 1991, after altogether sixteen years in prison, Tiedemann was eventually released. From what we know, she and Albertz developed their relationship into a close and lasting friendship.⁶³ When Albertz died on 18 May 1993, she was one of the speakers at the memorial service in his former Berlin parish. Tiedemann reminded those present of how his humour, paternal attitude and his ability to listen had eased

⁵⁹ Eva Tasche, “Ist sie’s oder ist sie’s nicht?” *Deutsche Presse Agentur*, 11.1.1990.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Cp. e.g. Giovanni di Lorenzo, “Gibt es ein Leben nach dem Terrorismus? Nach insgesamt 14 Jahren Haft steht Gabriele Tiedemann wieder vor Gericht.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung Wochenendbeilage*, 19 & 20 May 1990.

⁶² Heinrich Albertz, *Am Ende des Weges. Nachdenken über das Alter* (Munich: Kindler, 1989), pp. 78-9.

⁶³ Albertz, *Wir dürfen nicht schweigen*, pp. 78-9.

the tensions aboard the Lufthansa Boeing on its way from Frankfurt to Aden.⁶⁴ She did not have much time to enjoy her regained freedom. In October 1995, only four-and-a-half years after her release, she died from cancer at age forty-four.

Conclusion

Now, what is one to make of all this? Admittedly, the two paradoxes that have been mentioned at different points in this paper have not been completely unravelled. They were however illustrated and given sharper contours. This way it should have become clearer how the modernisation of West German society by SPD-led governments could go hand in hand with political repression of those who were deemed to be enemies of democracy. Furthermore, by pointing to generation conflict, a crucial component for developing a historical understanding of the escalation of violence between militant Left and West German state and society has been emphasized.

However, as far as the role of the “1968ers” in the socio-cultural transformation of the country is concerned, it is much too early to come to any valid conclusions. Much more historical research on this period is needed. As Wolfgang Kraushaar put it: “Curtains closed and all archives open – at least most of them.”⁶⁵

Finally, is there a deeper meaning to the story of Gaby Tiedemann and Heinrich Albertz beyond the fact that he assumed the role of a surrogate father for her? In place of an answer, consider the following passage from Weber’s *Politics as a Vocation*, written in 1919, in times of significantly greater political turmoil:

The man who is concerned for the welfare of his soul and the salvation of the souls of others does not seek these aims along the path of politics. Politics has quite different goals which can only be achieved by force.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Schuster, *Heinrich Albertz*, pp. 295-6.

⁶⁵ Kraushaar, 1968, p. 347.

⁶⁶ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation.” In W. G. Runciman ed., *Weber. Selections in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 212-25, here p. 223.